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“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,” II Peter 3:10.

The Lord Cometh

Lesson Aim: To encourage a greater degree of expectancy of His return.

L73. Date: August 1966. **Text:** II Peter 3:1-13. **Topic:** Christ: Return of.

INTRODUCTION

“Jesus is coming!” This grand truth should fill the headlines of every paper in the nation today. It should be flashed around the globe by radio and television in every language of men. It should be repeated again and again until all men have heard it and understand its significance. This truth is the hope of the Christian, the urgent warning to the sinner, and the judgment of the world. Jesus really is coming again!

The return of the Lord Jesus is a “blessed hope” for God's redeemed saints, Titus 2:13. With that return is associated the resurrection unto life, transformation into the likeness of the Lord, reunion with the saints who have died in the Lord, the marriage of the Lamb, and all the blessed experiences related to the full realization of the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Lord's return will cease all anxious labors, cure all illness, comfort all sorrow, answer all prayer, and bring ultimate victory to the saints. Oh, that the blessed day may come soon!

The fact that Jesus comes again should spur the Christian to his utmost efforts, his purest devotion, his highest purpose, and unceasing concern for the salvation of men. The fact that Jesus is coming should challenge the sinner to think seriously on his way and seek security in the only Saviour. How would it fare with you if He were to come today?

EXPOSITION

I. DISBELIEF OF HIS COMING, 3:1-4.

1. The prophets foretold the return of Jesus to earth, verses 1-3. The message of the return of Jesus Christ is no new message. It is as old as God's prophetic word. Let one read the Old Testament prophets and he will see many references to the King, His kingdom, and the victory of righteousness over all iniquity. To these revelations have been added the testimony of the apostles of the Lord. Peter admonishes the saints to keep the testimony of the Scriptures in mind because they shed light on one's present walk, and upon the otherwise unknown events of the future. Both the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament predicted the coming of Jesus and foretold of those who would deny His coming. One need not be surprised, therefore, if those believing this heresy arise today

2. The return of the Lord Jesus is denied because men walk in lust, verse 3. Lust means the inordinate desire for a thing. Perhaps it is a desire to popularity and fame, or a desire to be known for superior wisdom, or a desire for some other earthly advantage which prompts men to go off into heresy. Peter plainly says, however, that men "walking after their own lusts" go astray when they deny the coming of Jesus. It is well to remember this when one listens to one who denies this reality.

Even in the pulpits of professedly orthodox churches there are ministers today who declare that the Bible does not teach the second coming of Christ, or else maintain that even though predicted by Christ and His apostles, it is all to be looked upon as an idle dream. God forbid! **"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind, both shall fall into the ditch,"** Matthew 15:14.

3. The denial of the second coming of the Lord is based upon carnal reasoning, verse 4. With contempt the unbelievers ask, **"Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."** With such words they insist that there is no evidence in past history nor present circumstances which indicates a return of the Lord. In a supposed wisdom superior to the Bible they pass judgment upon the truths of God's Word and brand them lies. Moreover, many congregations of people are gullible and unlearned in the things of God so that they accept such teachings without questioning them. Spiritually-minded men can see the "signs of the times" about them but carnal and sensual leaders of much of the world's religious life cannot understand them.

The very fact that there are such blind religious leaders is a sign of the Lord's near return. The mad race of the world toward world government,

godless forms of political philosophy, and general disregard of the dignity of man and the worth of the individual are further signs. Even the blind political liberalism which is directing our own nation toward socialism is an evidence of the same spiritual failure. God have mercy upon His children and hasten the day of the coming of the Lord Jesus. Man cannot see the day by carnal reasonings, but the spiritual Christian can look forward to it with faith that makes it as real as if it were a present possession. It is the believer's "blessed hope," Titus 2:13.

II. ASSURANCE OF HIS COMING, 3:5-9.

1. Judgments in the past and warnings of the future guarantee the coming of the Lord, verses 5-7. Men who lived before the flood said to God, **"Depart from us: for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways,"** Job 21:14. God answered their rebellion with a flood of waters in which all things that had "the breath of life" in its nostrils died, Genesis 6:17; 7:22.

God has never permitted sins to go unrewarded. Man's sins against God and man have always been answered by judgment. Has God changed so that He no longer judges? No, indeed! **"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil,"** Ecclesiastes 12:14. The future, as well as the past, holds a time of Judgment. Peter remembers a time of judgment. Peter remembers God's promise to destroy the earth no more with a flood of waters, Genesis 9:11. However, he still looks for God to send judgment. This time the judgment will be by fire! This verse can be translated. "the heavens and the earth are stored with fire," waiting the time of judgment.

The explosion of atomic bombs demonstrates the terrible destructive forces latent in nature. God has only to remove His power which makes all things consist (Colossians 1:17) and the world would be immediately enveloped in a universal conflagration. No man's bomb will set things off and destroy the earth before God's time. He controls that. Yet man's destructive ability should lead him to fear the judgment of the Creator of this indescribable universe of which man is a part. **"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up,"** II Peter 3:10.

2. God's freedom from time limitations assures the coming of Jesus, verse 8. The first disciples of Jesus expected Him to return within their lifetime—especially within the lifetime of the Apostle John (John 21:20-23).

Jesus did not return during that time. Almost two thousand years more have passed and He still has not returned. Is it possible that God has forgotten and changed His plans? No! The seeming delay of the Lord is because of His deep concern for the lost men whose hope for salvation would be eternally gone if Jesus came today.

A thousand years seem like a long time to men, but it only is a day to God. He is working out His purpose in human history. Men may doubt and question, but God sees the future as well as the past. The day will speedily come when, according to His faithful promise, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first," I Thessalonians 4:16. God alone knows that day, but He assuredly has it set. Each tick of the clock brings it nearer!

3. God's faithfulness and concern for men guarantee the coming of the Lord Jesus, verse 9. The seeming delay of the return of Jesus is not due to God's slackness (neglect) in performing His promise. It rather indicates His concern for those yet to be saved. He awaits to offer salvation to all who will turn to Him in repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish.

But the same concern which prompts Him to wait and plead with sinners will also assure the second coming of our Saviour. Those who have already believed are precious to God. Their ultimate redemption is not accomplished, however, until they are resurrected (or changed, if they are alive when Jesus returns) and made like the Lord. Deliverance from the presence of sin is the ultimate phase of what was purchased for believers on Calvary. God will not neglect these children. His great concern for the unsaved only reveals His increasingly greater concern for the redeemed. No, God is not neglectful in fulfilling His promises. Believers may rest confident that the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is as sure as if it had already happened!

III. CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS COMING, 3:10-13.

1. His coming will be unexpected, verse 10. **"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."** The day of the Lord will be a time of judgment upon the ungodly and impenitent while it is a time of victory and deliverance for the redeemed. This day will come (especially upon unbelievers) as a thief in the night. It will be unexpected. It will come upon them to their great loss.

Peter leaves no doubt but that this great day will certainly come. It will be sudden and without announcement. Believers are not in darkness that the day should overtake them as a thief, I Thessalonians 5:4.

Those who boast themselves of tomorrow and think they can be saved any time they desire should observe this seriously. Those who dare to trifle with God should learn that to do so is to gamble with the eternal destiny of their souls at stake. The coming of Jesus is too certain, too indefinite as to time, and too significant in relation to eternity, for anyone to sleep another night or live another day without preparation for it.

2. His coming will be marked by judgment, 10-12. The apostle now speaks specifically of the judgment to be meted out against an earth cursed by sin, Genesis 3:17-18. A great noise shall rend the heavens and intense heat shall melt the bodies of the solar creation. The earth and all the works therein shall be burned up. The whole creation shall be dissolved in the heat and purified by the fire of judgment. Such a thing seemed impossible in previous years, for the Scripture seems to say even the atmosphere will burn. But when scientists discovered the atom could be split (even unbelieving scientists admitted II Peter 3:10-12 was “scientifically” possible. God knew it all the time.

If this is the fate of the material creation which is cursed by sin, what must be the judgment awaiting man—who by free choice of their wills choose to serve sin instead of surrendering to the Saviour! How urgent that men prepare to meet God and escape this fateful day of judgment! It comes unexpectedly and unannounced. No man knows the date. **“To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,”** Hebrews 4:7.

3. His coming will bring into existence a new creation, verse 13. The coming of Jesus Christ will be the consummation of the age. Then will be realized a truth which has blessed the hearts of countless Christians: a new heaven and a new earth will come into existence. **“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem rejoicing, and her people a joy,”** Isaiah 65:17-18.

The new heaven and earth will be a place where righteousness and righteous people dwell. Righteousness has its home there in a sense in which it could not be at home in this present world. Therein will be the redeemed of God (Revelation 21:27). The glory of God will lighten it (21:23) and His presence will bless it (21:3). God will come down to the new earth to dwell with the redeemed. No more tears, death, nor disappointments of the former existence will be there. This shall be “heaven upon earth” because God's presence will be upon the new earth and God's people shall be there. All of this comes at the consummation of the age after the coming of Jesus Christ. The devout Christian often prays, **“Even so, come, Lord Jesus,”** Revelation

22:20.

CONCLUSION

Some have objected to an emphasis on the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus saying it makes the Christian faith too “other worldly” and hinders service now. This is incorrect. Rather than making Christians idle, awaiting their “pie in the sky bye and bye,” a firm belief in the Second Coming inspires believers to service. If the Lord Jesus really is coming again to bring the age to a consummation, we must win souls while there is time. If His coming is indefinite as to time, we must be ready for Him any hour of each day. What an inspiration to service! What an encouragement for the weary! What a call to salvation! Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the Second Coming?
2. Why do some doubt or deny it?
3. How do past judgments guarantee it?
4. How does God's relationship to time differ from ours?
5. What does II Peter 3:9 say concerning it?
6. Why will His return be unexpected?
7. Why is His return the “blessed hope” for believers?
8. Are you expecting the Lord's return today? Why?